



PHOTOGRAPHY NEWS

SOMETHING FISHY

Olympus has announced an 8mm fisheye lens for its Olympus E-System digital SLR cameras. The new lens gives a 180° field of view, and a multilayered coating cuts down ghosting and flaring. You'll have to wait until January 2006 before paying an as yet undisclosed sum to secure one, though.



RAW WINDOWS

Microsoft has declared that the next version of Windows, currently codenamed Longhorn, will have native support for a variety of RAW image files. Although a complete compatibility list is not yet available, Microsoft has been working with Canon, Nikon, FujiFilm and Adobe. In the meantime, it has released a tool that allows XP users to view and print RAW images from most Canon and Nikon cameras. You can download the 47.7MB RAW Image Thumbnailer and Viewer tool from the Microsoft website at www.microsoft.com.

WATERY SHOT

FujiFilm has created an underwater housing for the FinePix F10, which won last month's digital camera Labs test. The garishly coloured WP-FXF10 keeps the F10 dry down to 40 metres while allowing access to all its controls. The housing comes with a wrist strap and a spare o-ring and is available to buy now for around £150.



SAMSUNG BONANZA

Samsung has announced six new digital cameras. Five are 5-megapixel additions to the A-series and L-series ranges. The A502 is a fixed-lens camera with a 1.8" screen, while the A55W has a 5x zoom lens and the A50 has a 3x zoom lens. Both have a 2.5" LCD screen and 32MB of built-in memory. The more advanced L50 (below left) has a 3x zoom lens and the L55W (below right) has a 4x wide-angle lens. Both have 2.8" widescreen displays adapted from those Samsung uses in its mobile phones.

The Pro815 is the most advanced of the new models. It has an 8-megapixel sensor, a huge 15x zoom lens and a 3.5" LCD screen. No prices have been announced yet, but all six cameras should be available soon.



REVIEW DIGITAL CAMERA

NIKON Coolpix 7600

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £211 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.7dayshop.com

DETAILS www.nikon.co.uk

Nikon's Coolpix 7600 might not be the most attractive compact digital camera, but thanks to its chunky grip, which houses two rechargeable AA batteries, it is comfortable to use. It's also one of just a few to have an optical viewfinder, although sadly it's too small to be of practical use. The 1.8" screen is much better for reviewing and framing your shots. Its incredibly fast refresh rate more than makes up for its relatively diminutive size. All the necessary buttons are well placed, and a dial provides quick access to video and still shooting modes and the camera setup menu.

At its highest quality setting, the 7600's 7-megapixel sensor records images at 3,072x2,304 pixels. Using slightly compressed JPEG files, this results in photo files of around 2.5MB. With so much data to write, the Coolpix 7600 takes several seconds to save each photo before it's ready to take the next. Although this is annoying, the auto focus and exposure engines operate efficiently, so the camera still feels reasonably responsive. The batteries supply enough power on full charge for just over 150 shots, and you can always buy some standard AA cells when you're out and about.

The 7600 produces well-balanced photos. It occasionally struggles to gauge the right exposure



for your intended subject, but you can fix this using the exposure compensation function. Colours are captured faithfully but, despite its high resolution, photos from the 7600 aren't as sharp as those from some 5-megapixel cameras we've reviewed. It performed excellently in low light when using the flash, producing accurate, lively photos. It also has a respectable video mode, which can record 640x480 pixels at 30fps.

The Coolpix 7600 produced decent results across the board. It takes fairly good photos in all lighting conditions and excels when using the flash, but it doesn't make the most of its 7-megapixel sensor.

David McKinnon



Good for flash photography; decent video mode



No sharper than the best 5-megapixel cameras

SPECIFICATIONS 3,072x2,304 resolution, 3x zoom lens, 14MB internal memory (accepts SD memory cards). **Part code** VAA370BA

HOTLIST DIGITAL CAMERA

NIKON Coolpix 8800

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £494 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.7dayshop.com

DETAILS www.nikon.co.uk

An incredible 10x optical zoom takes the Coolpix 8800 right to the centre of the action, and its 8-megapixel CCD provides plenty of detail. However, at this price facts and figures would mean nothing without stunning image quality, and here the Coolpix 8800 delivers in spades. It's simply the best integrated digital camera available, and it won our Labs test of professional-quality digital cameras in Shopper April 2005.



SPECIFICATIONS 3,265x2,448 resolution, 10x (35-350mm) optical zoom, CompactFlash type I/II (none supplied). **Part code** VAA280BA



HOTLIST TRANSPARENCY SCANNER

EPSON Perfection 4180 Photo

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £150 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.cameras2u.com

DETAILS www.epson.co.uk

If you want to get the best from your photos and slides when transferring them to your PC, you have to aim for maximum scanning resolution.

The Perfection 4180 Photo scans at a maximum of 4,800x9,600dpi, so you can be sure you'll capture every last detail. It can scan up to six slides at once, so it shouldn't take too long to digitise your entire collection.



SPECIFICATIONS 4,800x9,600 optical resolution, 35mm, slide, 120-roll transparency adaptor, USB Hi-Speed interface. **Part code** B11B170024





REVIEW DIGITAL CAMERA

CANON

PowerShot S2 IS

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £339 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.easygadget.co.ukDETAILS www.canon.co.uk

Weighing just over half a kilo, Canon's 5-megapixel PowerShot S2 IS is a hefty camera. Its large silver body feels robust and the protruding textured grip makes the camera comfortable to use. The zoom rocker and shutter button are perfectly positioned under your index finger, and your right thumb falls naturally on the directional control pad at the rear.

Most of the S2's weight seems to be concentrated in the lens barrel, which houses a two-speed, 11-element, 12x zoom lens equivalent to 36-432mm in a 35mm film camera. Canon supplements this impressive zoom range with an optical image-stabilising mechanism. This has two operating modes, one for continuous stabilisation and one that kicks in only when the shutter is released. The latter is the more effective of the two. It allows you to shoot at the full extent of the zoom and in low light with slow shutter speeds without resorting to a tripod.

The lens barrel has two buttons. One activates the manual focus, which you have to operate using the direction pad on the rear. This is fiddly and imprecise and we'd much prefer a barrel ring. The other button activates the stunning two-stage macro mode, which allows you to focus even when the subject is literally touching the lens. Although

it's difficult to light anything so close to the lens, it makes for some impressive close-up photographs.

You can frame shots using either the LCD viewfinder or the 1.8" fold-out LCD screen. The latter rotates 90° downward, enabling you to take accurate photos with the camera above your head, and around by 180° so you can take self-portraits without resorting to guesswork.

A large mode dial on the top of the camera body switches between the main shooting modes. The Auto mode limits your options to image size, but Program mode gives you free rein over the full gamut of ISO, exposure compensation, flash adjust, image effect, white balance and bracketing options. You can bracket for either focus or exposure. The S2 IS also offers Aperture and Shutter priority modes as well as full Manual, Custom, Portrait, Landscape and Night Scene settings and a bi-directional stitch assist tool.

You can access the Movie mode at any time in any mode by pressing the dedicated movie record button. The S2 IS records AVI movies at up to 640x480 at 30fps and with stereo sound, although it saves them as combined AVI and WAV files rather than MPEG4. You can use the full zoom range with image stabilisation while shooting, and you can even take a full-resolution still photograph in mid-flow, although this interrupts the video recording.

The S2 IS takes superb photos. Although it records at only 2,560x1,920 pixels, its zoom lens lets you fill the frame with your subject. It also captures scenes in rich, living colour. Noise starts to creep in at ISOs above 200, though, so try to use longer shutter speeds and set the ISO manually instead. Exposure and white balance are usually gauged to perfection, and the DIGIC II processor makes the camera very responsive, writing your photos to the memory card very quickly.

There is no doubting the quality of the PowerShot S2 IS. It takes wonderfully rich pictures, has a bright 12x zoom lens with image stabilisation and is a joy to use. Panasonic's DMC-FZ5 has an equally effective sensor and stabilised lens but a smaller range of features. For sheer versatility, the S2 IS wins our Best Buy award.

David McKinnon

✓ Excellent lens; rich photos; huge range of features

✗ A bit noisy above ISO 200

SPECIFICATIONS 2,560x1,920 resolution, stabilised 12x zoom lens (36-432mm), 16MB SD card. **Part code** 9883A007AA

HOTLIST SCANNER

MUSTEK

Be@rpaw 4800TA Pro II

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £68 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.dabs.comDETAILS www.mustek.co.uk

It may have been around for a while, but this scanner still offers the entry-level buyer above-average transparency results. It's easy to operate, with a simplified control panel for those who find the TWAIN interface too much. Scan quality isn't perfect, it's not as fast as many other scanners and there are no Mac drivers, but it's a great value all-rounder.

SPECIFICATIONS 2,400x4,800 optical resolution, 35mm, slide transparency adaptor, USB Hi-Speed interface. **Part code** 98-155-00010



HOTLIST DIGITAL CAMERA

FUJIFILM

FinePix F10

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £226 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.dabs.comDETAILS www.fujifilm.com

FujiFilm's metal-bodied FinePix F10 has a highly sensitive 6-megapixel sensor behind its 3x zoom lens. This makes it excellent for low-light photography. Its battery can run and run, lasting up to 500 shots between charges, and it's the most responsive camera we've tested. It also produces the sharpest photos we've seen from a compact camera.

SPECIFICATIONS 2,848x2,136 resolution, 3x zoom lens (36-108mm), 16MB xD memory. **Part code** N076590A



HOTLIST DIGITAL CAMERA

CANON

PowerShot A510

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £128 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.7dayshop.comDETAILS www.canon.co.uk

Canon has crammed a lot of controls into the A510, but it's still easy to use. It's comfortable to hold and uses standard AA batteries. The 3.2-megapixel camera has a 4x optical zoom and produces clear and vivid photos in automatic mode. Slip it into manual mode, though, and you can set the aperture and shutter speed, which is unusual for such an inexpensive camera.

SPECIFICATIONS 2,048x1,536 resolution, 4x optical zoom, 16MB SD memory. **Part code** 9717A007AA





REVIEW DIGITAL CAMERA

PENTAX
Optio S5n

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £193 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.dabs.comDETAILS www.pentax.co.uk

Weighing just 120g, Pentax's Optio S5n is one of the lightest cameras we've tested. It's small enough to slip into a shirt pocket, while its rounded edges and etched front panel make it comfortable to hold. Its 2" LCD is bright enough to use on a sunny day and detailed enough for you to review your photos accurately. The control buttons are well laid out and labelled. Unfortunately the menu system isn't so easy to navigate, but it doesn't take long to master.

The S5n takes several seconds to transfer a photo to either the 12MB of internal memory or an SD memory card after you press the shutter button. This makes it less responsive than many cameras and can be frustrating if you're taking photos of a moving subject.

Sixteen shooting modes are available, including eight scene modes, a 30fps 640x480 movie mode and a special effect mode that allows you to posterise, stretch or apply soft focus to photos. The S5n performs well in most lighting conditions, producing well-balanced and detailed photos. Colours tend to be neutral rather than vibrant, but if you want punchier pictures you can always adjust

the contrast, saturation and sharpness with the on-camera controls. The S5n tends to gauge exposure for shadows rather than highlights. This looks OK for snapshots and can be corrected using the camera's controls if you wish. The camera takes around 150 photos on a full battery, which is just enough for a day of sightseeing as long as you don't use precious power to review your shots too often.

The Optio S5n is a decent camera for holiday snapshots, producing reasonably sharp and well-balanced photos. With a longer battery life and speedier operation it would be much better.

David McKinnon



Lightweight; turns out pleasing, neutral photos



Lag between photos; relatively short battery life

SPECIFICATIONS 2,560x1,920 resolution, 3x zoom lens (35.6-107mm), 12MB internal memory (accepts SD cards). **Part code** 18372

REVIEW DIGITAL CAMERA

FUJIFILM
Z1

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £243 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.cameras2u.comDETAILS www.fujifilm.com

Fujifilm's FinePix Z1 is about the size of a deck of cards, and a sliding front panel protects its small, recessed 3x zoom lens when closed. On opening the Z1 is ready for action almost instantly. A bright 2.5" screen occupies almost the entire back panel, but it isn't as detailed as we'd like. It's fine for framing shots, but to view your pictures properly you'll have to use a computer.

The large screen leaves little room for the controls, but although small they are firm, responsive and well arranged. A function button gives instant access to image resolution, ISO and colour settings, while more comprehensive settings are available in a separate mode-sensitive menu.

You must use the supplied cradle to connect the Z1 to your computer or recharge its battery. This method is becoming more common with compact point-and-shoot cameras. Although we would prefer to be given the option of using a simple cable, the cradle is convenient if you tend to use only one computer.

Outdoors, the FinePix Z1 takes bright, clean and vibrant photos at its highest detail setting. Its 5-megapixel sensor picks up fine detail well and, while colours are slightly more saturated than they

are in real life, the results are generally excellent. Compression artefacts appear at lower detail levels, so we'd recommend shooting at the highest level if you want to print enlargements.

Pictures taken indoors are not as impressive. The flash is weak and white balance is seldom gauged correctly. Most pictures exhibit a high level of noise and are not as sharp as we'd like. This is a real drawback for a party camera such as the Z1. It's easy to use and takes great pictures outdoors, but in low light the Z1 isn't quite up to scratch.

David McKinnon



Compact; well protected and responsive



Struggles in low light

SPECIFICATIONS 2,569x1,944 resolution, 3x zoom lens (36-108mm), 16MB xD memory. **Part code** N076610A

CHOOSING A...

DIGITAL
CAMERA

Follow our step-by-step guide to identify your ideal camera

1 A digital camera with the specifications in grey below will suit someone looking for a point-and-click camera that produces images that look decent when printed at the standard 6x4" dimensions. It has a TFT screen for previewing, reviewing and deleting shots and for changing settings. Such cameras cost around £100. Cheaper models are available, but their basic quality means they are best avoided.

2 An additional optical viewfinder allows you to take pictures when strong sunlight makes the TFT screen hard to see. You can also preserve batteries by switching the TFT screen off.

3 The camera's top resolution depends on the size of its CCD sensor. A two-megapixel camera produces 1,600x1,200 photos, but higher resolutions allow you to print enlargements without making the image blocky. Three megapixels is common, and you can get five or more without spending a fortune.

4 A digital zoom only guesses the extra detail required to zoom in on a subject. Far better is an optical zoom with a moving lens that enlarges the image as it hits the CCD. The lens should also have a quick and accurate auto-focus.

5 Serious photographers need plenty of manual control over focus, aperture, shutter speed and white balance and, ideally, plenty of physical controls for quick access. Many cameras offer preset modes to improve results.

6 Consider hidden costs. Most cameras will require a memory card upgrade to at least 64MB if they are to hold more than a dozen pictures at a time. Some come with internal rechargeable batteries, making the camera compact, while some accept AA batteries, allowing you to carry spares.

FILL IN YOUR SPECS HERE

(Recommended minimum in grey)

RESOLUTION: 2,046x1,536 pixels

ZOOM: 2x optical

MONITORING: 1" colour TFT screen

SUPPLIED MEMORY: 16MB

BATTERIES: Disposable

www.computershopper.co.uk